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EPA will study rules on workplace smoking

By Charles Campbell
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency said Wednesday it is drawing up a guide to workplace smoking restrictions and an assessment of the cancer risk to non-smokers exposed to cigarette smoke.

EPA sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the draft assessment includes a statement that "passive smoking" is a known carcinogen, responsible for more than 3,000 cases of lung cancer among non-smokers each year.

Agency spokesman Dave Ryan said he could not discuss the content of the draft until it is submitted to an independent science advisory board, probably later this month.

The agency is not ready to make the draft public yet, because the scientific review "could significantly change its findings," Ryan said.

The EPA sources said the proposed conclusions include a statement that non-smokers develop 3,000 cases of lung cancer each year from exposure to what the agency calls "environmental tobacco smoke" or ETS.

The draft conclusions were reported first in Wednesday's Los Angeles Times.

The separate policy guide "will describe the technical basis for smok-

ing restrictions as well as the technical and policy options for mitigating exposures" to tobacco smoke, the agency said.

John Banzhaf, executive director of Action on Smoking and Health, an anti-smoking group, said the EPA report could increase pressure for tighter restrictions on smoking.

"I think there's going to be a tremendous breakthrough when the average person realizes that tobacco smoke can kill him or his loved one," Banzhaf said.

"What they will report is that tobacco smoke is more dangerous than all of the other pollutants we regulate put together," he said. "Tobacco smoke is far more dangerous than radon, it is far more dangerous than lead in gasoline, it is far more dangerous than asbestos."

Thomas Lauria, assistant to the president of the Tobacco Institute, said most of the 24 studies on which the draft is based found no significant evidence that tobacco smoke causes cancer among non-smokers. Many of the studies looked at very small numbers of people, or had no connection to smoking in the workplace, he said.

"I feel confident that the draft will undergo rigorous analysis," Lauria said. "It is wide open as far as any conclusions are concerned."

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